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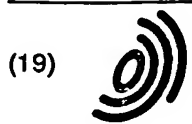
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(54) Cables with a halogen-free recyclable coating comprising polypropylene and an ethylene copolymer having high structural uniformity

(57) A cable, in particular for power transmission, for telecommunications or for data transmission, or also combined power/telecommunications cables, wherein at least one coating layer consists of a recyclable material which is halogen-free and has superior mechanical and electrical properties. This material consists of a polymer mixture comprising: (a) a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer; and (b) a copolymer of ethylene with at least one alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, and optionally with a diene; the said copolymer (b) being characterized by a density of between 0.90 and 0.86 g/cm³ and by a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%.

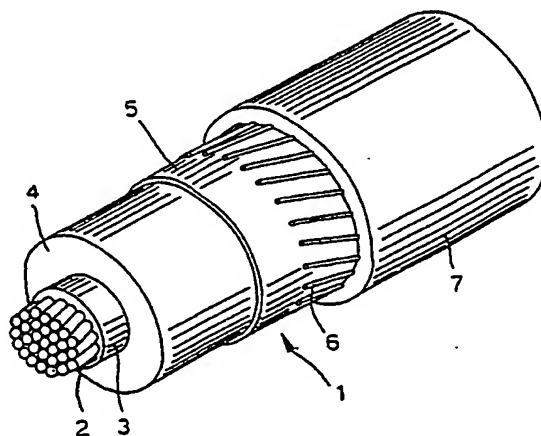


FIG. 1

EP 0 893 802 A1

Description

The present invention relates to cables, in particular for power transmission, for telecommunications or for data transmission, or also combined power/telecommunications cables, wherein at least one coating layer consists of a recyclable material which is halogen-free and has superior mechanical and electrical properties.

There is currently a great need for highly environmentally friendly products, consisting of materials which are not harmful to the environment either during their production or when in use, and which are readily recyclable at the end of their working life. However, the option of using ecological materials is, in all cases, subject to the need to keep costs within acceptable limits, while still guaranteeing performances which are at least equivalent to those of conventional materials and which are, in any case, satisfactory under the most common conditions of use.

In the cables sector, in particular power transmission cables, the various coatings surrounding the conductor commonly consist of crosslinked polymer materials, in particular polyethylene or ethylene copolymers suitably crosslinked during extrusion, so as to give satisfactory mechanical performances even under heating in continuous use and under conditions of current overload, while at the same time maintaining a high level of flexibility. These materials are crosslinked and therefore cannot be recycled since they are devoid of thermoplastic properties, hence they can only be disposed of at the end of their working life by means of incineration. Moreover, in certain cases the outer protective sheath consists of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) which is difficult to separate by conventional methods (for example in water by density differences) from the crosslinked polyolefins containing inorganic fillers (for example from ethylene/propylene rubbers containing inorganic fillers), and, on the other hand, PVC cannot be incinerated together with crosslinked polyolefins since this produces highly toxic chlorinated products by combustion.

In U.S. Patent No. 4,948,669 cable-coating compositions are described comprising from 29 to 50% by weight of low-density polyethylene, containing as comonomer an alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, in particular 1-octene, in an amount such as to obtain a density of between 0.90 and 0.92 g/cm³, in admixture with: (a) a propylene homopolymer; (b) a non-elastomeric copolymer of propylene with ethylene; or (c) heterogeneous copolymers of propylene with ethylene, obtained in reactor. As polyethylene it is particularly suggested using product Dowlax[®] 4000E from Dow Chemical, containing about 17% of 1-octene and having a melt index equal to 3.3 and a density of 0.912 g/cm³. These are products obtained using titanium-based Ziegler-Natta catalysts, having a relatively high density and thus little flexibility.

In patent application WO 96/23311 a low-voltage high-current cable is described, wherein the insulating coating, the inner sheath and the outer sheath are made of the same non-crosslinked polymer-based material which is black coloured by addition of carbon black. Using the same base material would allow recycling without the need to separate different materials. As polymer material for the outer sheath, it is suggested using, in place of PVC, ultra-low-density polyethylene (ULD-PE), for example products Engage[®] from DuPont-Dow Elastomers and Exxpol[®] from Exxon. Inorganic fillers such as aluminium or magnesium hydroxide are added to these materials in order to give them flame-retardant properties.

In U.S. Patent No. 5,246,783 cables are described, having as insulating and/or semiconductive coatings polymer materials based on copolymers of ethylene with at least one C₃-C₂₀ alpha-olefin, with a density of from 0.86 to 0.96 g/cm³, known commercially under the tradename Exact[®] from Exxon, preparable using metallocene catalysts. These copolymers are used in crosslinked form, achieved by chemical means (for example with dicumyl peroxide) or by irradiation.

The Applicant has perceived that the technical problem of obtaining a cable with a coating made of a non-crosslinked, and thus recyclable, polymer material which also has mechanical and electrical properties suitable to the usual conditions of use is dependent on the use of a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer mixed with a copolymer of ethylene with an alpha-olefin having a low density and a high structural uniformity, in particular having a highly homogeneous distribution of the alpha-olefin between the polymer molecules. This high structural uniformity is obtainable in particular by copolymerization of the corresponding monomers in the presence of a single-site catalyst, for example a metallocene catalyst.

In particular, the Applicant has found that excellent performances, both in terms of mechanical properties, in particular elongation at break, stress at break and modulus, and in terms of electrical properties, may be obtained by using, as non-crosslinked base material for at least one of the coating layers of the cable, a mixture as defined hereinbelow, comprising polypropylene and a copolymer of ethylene with at least one C₄-C₁₂ alpha-olefin and optionally with a diene comonomer, having a density of from 0.90 to 0.86 g/cm³ and a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%.

Therefore, according to a first aspect, the invention relates to a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers comprises, as non-crosslinked base polymer material, a mixture comprising: (a) a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer; and (b) a copolymer of ethylene with at least one alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, and optionally with a diene; the said copolymer (b) being character-

ized by a density of from 0.90 to 0.86 g/cm³ and a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%.

According to a further aspect, the invention relates to a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers has electrical insulating properties and comprises a mixture as defined above as non-crosslinked base polymer material.

According to a further aspect, the invention relates to a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers has semiconductive properties and comprises a mixture as defined above as non-crosslinked base polymer material.

According to a further aspect, the invention relates to a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers is an outer protective sheath and comprises a mixture as defined above as non-crosslinked base polymer material.

According to a further aspect, the invention relates to a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least 70%, preferably at least 90%, by weight relative to the total weight of the base polymer material of the said coating layers consists of the mixture as defined above.

The Composition Distribution Index provides a measure of the distribution of the alpha-olefin between the copolymer molecules (the higher the value of this index, the more homogeneous is the distribution of the comonomer between the copolymer molecules) and can be determined by techniques of Temperature Rising Elution Fractionation, as described, for example, in patent US-5,008,204 or in Wild et al., *J. Poly. Sci. Poly. Phys. Ed.*, Vol. 20, p.441 (1982).

The copolymers (b) have a molecular weight distribution index, defined as the ratio between the weight-average molecular weight M_w and the number-average molecular weight M_n , which is generally low, usually between 1.5 and 3.5. The molecular weight distribution index can be determined by conventional methods, by means of Gel Permeation Chromatography (GPC).

The copolymers (b) are also generally characterized by a melting enthalpy of from 30 to 60 J/g.

Copolymers of ethylene with at least one C₄-C₁₂ alpha-olefin, and optionally with a diene, having these characteristics are obtainable by copolymerization of ethylene with the alpha-olefin, and optionally with the diene comonomer, in the presence of a single-site catalyst, for example a metallocene catalyst, as described, for example, in US patents Nos. 5,246,783 and 5,272,236, or alternatively they may be obtained commercially under the trademarks Engage[®] from DuPont-Dow Elastomers and Exact[®] from Exxon Chemical. The metallocenes used to polymerize the olefins are coordination complexes of a transition metal, usually from Group IV, in particular titanium, zirconium or hafnium, with two optionally substituted cyclopentadienyl ligands, used in combination with a co-catalyst, for example an alumoxane, preferably methylalumoxane, or a boron compound (see for example J.M.S.-Rev. Macromol. Chem. Phys., C34(3), 439-514 (1994); J. Organometallic Chemistry, 479 (1994), 1-29, or alternatively patents US-5,414,040, US-5,229,478, WO 93/19107 and EP-A-632,065, or the already mentioned US Patents Nos. 5,246,783 and 5,272,236). Catalysts which are suitable for obtaining the copolymers (b) according to the present invention are also the so-called Constrained Geometry Catalysts described, for example, in patents EP-416,815 and EP-418,044.

With the term alpha-olefin it is meant an olefin of formula CH₂=CH-R, where R is a linear or branched alkyl having from 2 to 10 carbon atoms. The alpha-olefin may be selected, for example, from 1-butene, 1-pentene, 4-methyl-1-pentene, 1-hexene, 1-octene, 1-dodecene and the like. 1-hexene and 1-octene are particularly preferred.

When a diene termonomer is present, this generally has from 4 to 20 carbon atoms, and is preferably selected from: linear, conjugated or non-conjugated diolefins, for example 1,3-butadiene, 1,4-hexadiene or 1,6-octadiene; monocyclic or polycyclic dienes, for example 1,4-cyclohexadiene, 5-ethylidene-2-norbornene, 5-methylene-2-norbornene and the like.

Ethylene/alpha-olefin or ethylene/alpha-olefin/ diene copolymers which can be used according to the present invention generally have the following composition: 75-97 mol%, preferably 90-95 mol%, of ethylene; 3-25 mol%, preferably 5-10 mol%, of alpha-olefin; 0-5 mol%, preferably 0-2 mol%, of a diene.

The crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) generally has a melting enthalpy of greater than 75 J/g, preferably greater than 85 J/g. It may be selected in particular from:

- (1) isotactic propylene homopolymers with an isotactic index of greater than 80, preferably greater than 90, even more preferably greater than 95;
- (2) propylene homopolymers obtainable using metallocene catalysts, having a pentad mmmm content of greater than 90% (determined by ¹³C-NMR analysis);
- (3) crystalline copolymers of propylene with ethylene and/or an alpha-olefin having from 4 to 10 carbon atoms, with an overall content of ethylene and/or alpha-olefin of less than 10 mol%;
- (4) heterogeneous propylene copolymers obtainable by block polymerization of propylene and of mixtures of propylene with ethylene and/or an alpha-olefin having from 4 to 10 carbon atoms, containing at least 70% by weight of polypropylene homopolymer or of crystalline propylene/ethylene copolymer, with an isotactic index of greater than

80, the remainder consisting of an elastomeric ethylene/propylene copolymer with a propylene content of from 30 to 70% by weight;

(5) crystalline propylene homopolymers or copolymers of syndiotactic structure, obtainable using metallocene catalysts.

According to the present invention, the ethylene/alpha-olefin or ethylene/alpha-olefin/diene copolymer (b) as described above is present in admixture with the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) in a predetermined amount, such as to make the resulting polymer mixture sufficiently flexible, and in particular so as to give it a elongation at break value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of at least 100%, preferably of at least 200%, and a 20% modulus value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of less than 10 MPa, preferably less than 7 MPa.

In general, these characteristics are obtainable using mixtures comprising from 10 to 60%, preferably from 15 to 50%, by weight of crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) and from 40 to 90%, preferably from 50 to 85%, by weight of ethylene/alpha-olefin or ethylene/alpha-olefin/diene copolymer (b), the percentages being relative to the total weight of the polymeric components (a) and (b).

In accordance with the present invention, the use of non-crosslinked polymer mixtures as defined above makes it possible to obtain a recyclable, flexible coating which has excellent mechanical properties, both in terms of modulus and in terms of elongation and stress at break. In particular, it is possible to obtain mechanical performances under heating, that is at 90°C for continuous use and at 130°C in the case of current overload, which are comparable with the typical performances of the polyethylene-based crosslinked coatings currently on sale, making the above-mentioned mixtures suitable not only for low voltage but also for medium- and high-voltage cables.

The mechanical properties mentioned above are accompanied by excellent electrical properties, such as insulation constant (Ki) and dielectric loss (tan delta), both under dry conditions and when the cable is submerged in water. In particular, it has been found that the non-crosslinked material according to the present invention has a very high insulation constant which is maintained within acceptable values even after prolonged immersion in water.

The fact that an insulating material has low water absorption makes it possible to reduce dielectric loss remarkably and thus to achieve lower energy dissipation levels, in particular during high power transmission. In the case of low-voltage high-current power transmission, low water absorption avoids an excessive reduction of electrical resistivity of the insulating material and thus of its electrical performance.

The polymer mixtures according to the present invention are also capable of containing inorganic fillers without an unacceptable reduction in their mechanical and elastic properties, in particular as to elongation at break, which remains well above 100%. It is thus possible to produce compositions with flame-retardant properties which are endowed with high flexibility and high mechanical strength.

Thus, according to a further aspect, the present invention relates to a flame-retardant polymer composition, comprising:

(a) a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer;

(b) a copolymer of ethylene with at least one alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, and optionally with a diene; the said copolymer (b) being characterized by a density of between 0.90 and 0.86 g/cm³ and by a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%;

(c) an inorganic filler in an amount such as to impart flame-retardant properties.

Moreover, a further aspect of the present invention resides in a cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers comprises a flame-retardant polymer composition as defined above.

The inorganic filler is generally an inorganic oxide, preferably in hydrate or hydroxide form. Examples of suitable compounds are aluminium, bismuth, cobalt, iron, magnesium, titanium or zinc oxides and the corresponding hydroxides, or mixtures thereof. Magnesium hydroxide, aluminium hydroxide and alumina trihydrate (Al₂O₃.3H₂O) or mixtures thereof are particularly preferred. One or more inorganic oxides or salts such as CoO, TiO₂, Sb₂O₃, ZnO, Fe₂O₃, CaCO₃ or mixtures thereof may advantageously be added to these compounds in minor amounts, generally less than 25% by weight. Preferably, the above-mentioned metal hydroxides, in particular magnesium and aluminium hydroxides, are used in the form of particles having sizes which can range from 0.1 to 100 µm, preferably from 0.5 to 10 µm. In the case of hydroxides, these may advantageously be used in the form of coated particles. Saturated or unsaturated fatty acids containing from 8 to 24 carbon atoms, and metal salts thereof, are usually used as coating materials, such as, for example: oleic acid, palmitic acid, stearic acid, isostearic acid, lauric acid; magnesium or zinc stearate or oleate; and the like.

The amount of inorganic filler which is suitable for imparting flame-retardant properties may vary within a wide

range, generally between 10 and 80% by weight, preferably between 30 and 70% by weight, with respect to the total weight of the composition.

A coupling agent selected from those known in the art, for example silane compounds or carboxylic derivatives having at least one ethylenic unsaturation can be added to the mixture in order to enhance the compatibility between the inorganic filler and the polymer matrix.

Examples of silane compounds which are suitable for this purpose are: γ -methacryloxypropyltrimethoxysilane, methyltriethoxysilane, methyltris(2-methoxy-ethoxy)silane, dimethyldiethoxysilane, vinyltris-(2-methoxyethoxy)silane, vinyltrimethoxysilane, vinyltriethoxysilane, octyltriethoxysilane, isobutyltriethoxysilane, isobutyltrimethoxysilane and mixtures thereof.

Carboxylic derivatives with ethylenic unsaturation which may advantageously be used as coupling agents are, for example, unsaturated carboxylic anhydrides or, preferably, unsaturated dicarboxylic anhydrides; maleic anhydride is particularly preferred. Alternatively, it is possible to use polyolefins as compatibilizing agents, these polyolefins optionally containing ethylenic unsaturations, on which carboxylic groups have been grafted by reaction with the above-mentioned carboxylic derivatives having at least one ethylenic unsaturation.

The coupling agent, either of silane type or of carboxylic type, can be used in its normal state or can be grafted to at least one of the polymer components of the mixture.

The amount of coupling agent to be added to the mixture may vary mainly depending on the type of coupling agent used and on the amount of inorganic filler added, and is generally between 0.05 and 30%, preferably between 0.1 and 20%, by weight, relative to the total weight of the base polymer mixture.

Other conventional components such as antioxidants, fillers, processing co-adjuvants, lubricants, pigments, water-tree retardant additives and the like are usually added to the base polymer material. In the case of the semiconductive layers 3 and 5, the polymer material is preferably filled with carbon black in an amount such as to give this material semiconductive properties (namely, so as to obtain a resistivity of less than 5 ohm.m at room temperature).

Suitable conventional antioxidants are, for example: polymerized trimethyldihydroquinoline, 4,4'-thiobis(3-methyl-6-tert-butylphenol); pentaerythryl-tetra[3-(3,5-di-tert-butyl-4-hydroxyphenyl)propionate], 2,2'-thiodiethylene-bis[3-(3,5-di-tert-butyl-4-hydroxyphenyl)propionate] and the like, or mixtures thereof.

Other fillers which may be used in the present invention include, for example, glass particles, glass fibres, calcined kaolin, talc and the like, or mixtures thereof. Processing co-adjuvants usually added to the polymer base are, for example, calcium stearate, zinc stearate, stearic acid, paraffin wax and the like, or mixtures thereof.

Further details will be illustrated in the following detailed description, with reference to the appended drawing, wherein:

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of an electrical cable, particularly suitable for medium voltages, according to the present invention.

In Fig. 1, the electrical cable 1 comprises a conductor 2; an inner layer 3 with semiconductive properties; an intermediate layer 4 with insulating properties; an outer layer 5 with semiconductive properties; a screen 6; and an outer sheath 7.

The conductor 2 generally consists of metal wires, preferably made of copper or aluminium, which are braided together using conventional techniques.

At least one of the layers 3, 4 and 5, and preferably at least the insulating layer 4, comprises polypropylene as non-crosslinked base polymer material, mixed with a copolymer of ethylene with at least one α -olefin, and optionally with a diene, as defined above. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, all of the insulating and semiconductive layers 3, 4 and 5 comprise a polymer mixture as defined above as non-crosslinked base polymer material.

A screen 6, generally consisting of helically wound electrically conductive wires or strips, is usually placed around the outer semiconductive layer 5. This screen is then covered with a sheath 7, consisting of a thermoplastic material such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), non-crosslinked polyethylene (PE) or, preferably, a mixture comprising polypropylene and an ethylene/ α -olefin or ethylene/ α -olefin/diene copolymer, as defined above.

Fig. 1 shows only one possible embodiment of a cable according to the present invention. It is clear that suitable changes known in the art may be made to this embodiment without thereby departing from the scope of the present invention. In particular, the recyclable polymer mixtures according to the present invention may advantageously also be used for coating telecommunications cables or data transmission cables, or alternatively combined power/telecommunications cables.

The properties of the polymer materials used according to the present invention (Cop. 1 and 2) and of the material used for comparative purposes (Cop. 3) are given in Table 1. As melting enthalpy the second melting value (ΔH_{2m}) is given, obtained by DSC at a scan speed of 10°C/min. The melt flow index (MFI) was measured according to ASTM standard D 1238/L (at 230°C and 21.6 N for polypropylene, and at 190°C and 21.6 N for ethylene/1-octene copolymers). The Composition Distribution Index (CDI) was determined by Temperature Rising Elution Fractionation tech-

niques.

TABLE 1

Polymer material	Density (g/cm ³)	MFI (dg/min)	CDI	ΔH_{2m} (J/g)
PP 1	0.900	1.6	-	98
PP 2	0.900	1.8	-	90
Cop.1	0.885	1.0	>70	55.6
Cop.2	0.868	0.5	>70	34.4
Cop.3	0.902	3.0	-	78.0

PP 1 (Moplen[®] S30G - Montell): isotactic polypropylene (homopolymer);

PP 2 (Moplen[®] EP2S30B - Montell): random crystalline propylene/ethylene copolymer;

Cop.1 (Engage[®] 8003 - DuPont-Dow Elastomers): ethylene/1-octene copolymer with 82/18 weight ratio (5.5 mol% of 1-octene), obtained by metallocene catalysis;

Cop. 2 (Engage[®] 8150 - DuPont-Dow Elastomers): ethylene/1-octene copolymer with 75/25 weight ratio (7.6 mol% of 1-octene), obtained by metallocene catalysis;

Cop. 3 (Stamylex[®] TMX 1000 - DSM): ethylene/1-octene copolymer (4.6 mol% of 1-octene), obtained using a titanium Ziegler-Natta catalyst.

The polymer materials in Table 1 were used to prepare the mixtures given in Table 2.

The mixtures 1-3a were prepared in a Brabender mixer (volume of the mixing chamber: 80 cm³), filled to 95% of volume. Mixing was carried out at a temperature of 170°C for a total time of 10 min (rotor speed: 40 rpm). At the end of the mixing, the final torque (reported in Table 2) was measured under the abovementioned conditions.

Mixtures 4, 5 and 6 were prepared in a 20 mm-diameter counter-rotatory Brabender twin-screw mixer with a rotor speed of 50 rpm and with the following temperature profile: 1st zone = 100°C, 2nd zone = 160°C, 3rd zone = 190°C, 4th zone = 190°C.

For the filled systems there were used:

Hydrofy[®] GS-1.5: Mg(OH)₂ coated with stearic acid from SIMA (average particle diameter: 2 µm; specific surface: 11 m²/g);

Rhodorsil[®] MF175U: silicone rubber from Rhône-Poulenc acting as processing co-adjuvant/lubricant.

The following were used as antioxidants:

Irganox® 1010 : pentaerythritol tetra[3-(3,5-di-tert-butyl-4-hydroxyphenyl)propionate] (Ciba-Geigy);

Irganox® PS802 FL: distearyl thiodipropionate (DSTDP) (Ciba-Geigy).

The compositions are given in Table 2 as phr (i.e. parts by weight per 100 parts of polymer matrix).

The mixtures thus obtained were subjected to mechanical tensile strength tests according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, on test specimens obtained from 1 mm-thick plates obtained by compression moulding at 190-195°C and 200 bar after preheating for 5 min at the same temperature. The pulling speed of the clamps was 250 mm/min for mixtures 1 - 3a, and 50 mm/min for mixtures 4, 5 and 6. The results are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2

EXAMPLE	1	1a	2	2a	3 (*)	3a (*)	4	5	6 (*)
PP 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	40	40
PP 2	35	35	35	35	35	35	-	-	-
Cop.1	65	65	-	-	-	-	60	-	-
Cop.2	-	-	65	65	-	-	-	60	-
Cop.3	-	-	-	-	65	65	-	-	60
Hydrofy® GS-1.5	-	160	-	160	-	160	-	-	-
Rhodosil® MF175U	-	1.5	-	1.5	-	1.5	-	-	-
Irganox® PS 802FL	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.2	0.2
Irganox® 1010	-	0.5	-	0.5	-	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1
Final torque (N.m)	6.2	9.8	7.8	11.2	6.1	7.3	-	-	-
Stress at break (MPa)	16.7	10.5	17.5	10.4	6.9	5.5	15.1	20.4	9.1
Elongation at break (%)	662	567	713	621	711	54	702	695	33
10% modulus (MPa)	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.1	4.5	8.3
20% modulus (MPa)	6.0	5.6	4.8	4.7	8.0	6.6	-	-	-

(*) comparative

Claims

1. A cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers comprises, as non-crosslinked base polymer material, a mixture comprising: (a) a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer; and (b) a copolymer of ethylene with at least one alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, and optionally with a diene; the said copolymer (b) being characterized by a density of between 0.90 and 0.86 g/cm³ and by a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%.
2. The cable according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the said coating layers has electrical insulating properties and comprises a mixture of (a) and (b) as non-crosslinked base polymer material.
3. The cable according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the said coating layers has semiconductive properties and comprises a mixture of (a) and (b) as non-crosslinked base polymer material.
4. The cable according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the said coating layers is an outer protective sheath and

comprises a mixture of (a) and (b) as non-crosslinked base polymer material.

5. The cable according to claim 1, wherein at least 70%, preferably at least 90%, by weight relative to the total weight of the base polymer material of the said coating layers consists of a mixture of (a) and (b).
6. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the copolymer (b) has a molecular weight distribution index of between 1.5 and 3.5.
7. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the copolymer (b) has a melting enthalpy of between 30 and 60 J/g.
8. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the copolymer (b) is obtainable by copolymerization of ethylene with an alpha-olefin, and optionally with a diene, in the presence of a single-site catalyst.
9. The cable according to claim 8, wherein the single-site catalyst is a metallocene catalyst.
10. The cable according to claim 8, wherein the single-site catalyst is a Constrained Geometry Catalyst.
11. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the copolymer (b) has the following composition: 75-97 mol% of ethylene; 3-25 mol% of alpha-olefin; 0-5 mol% of a diene.
12. The cable according claim 11, wherein the copolymer (b) has the following composition: 90-95 mol% of ethylene; 5-10 mol% of alpha-olefin; 0-2 mol% of a diene.
13. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein, in the copolymer (b), the alpha-olefin is 1-hexene or 1-octene.
14. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) has a melting enthalpy of greater than 75 J/g.
15. The cable according to claim 14, wherein the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) has a melting enthalpy of greater than 85 J/g.
16. The cable according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the copolymer (b) is present in admixture with the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) in a predetermined amount, such as to make the resulting polymer mixture sufficiently flexible.
17. The cable according to claim 16, wherein the copolymer (b) is present in admixture with the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) in an amount such that the resulting polymer mixture has a elongation at break value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of at least 100% and a 20% modulus value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of less than 10 MPa.
18. The cable according to claim 17, wherein the copolymer (b) is present in admixture with the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) in an amount such that the resulting polymer mixture has a elongation at break value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of at least 200%, and a 20% modulus value, measured according to CEI standard 20-34, § 5.1, of less than 7 MPa.
19. The cable according to anyone of the preceding claims, wherein the polymer mixture comprises from 10 to 60% by weight of crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) and from 40 to 90% by weight of copolymer (b), the percentages being relative to the total weight of the polymeric components (a) and (b).
20. The cable according to claim 19, wherein the polymer mixture comprises from 15 to 50% by weight of crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) and from 50 to 85% by weight of copolymer (b), the percentages being relative to the total weight of the polymeric components (a) and (b).
21. A flame-retardant polymer composition, comprising:
 - (a) a crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer;

(b) a copolymer of ethylene with at least one alpha-olefin having from 4 to 12 carbon atoms, and optionally with a diene; the said copolymer (b) being characterized by a density of between 0.90 and 0.86 g/cm³ and by a Composition Distribution Index, defined as the weight percentage of copolymer molecules having an alpha-olefin content within 50% of the average total molar content of alpha-olefin, of greater than 45%;

(c) an inorganic filler in an amount such as to impart flame-retardant properties.

22. The composition according to claim 21, wherein the copolymer (b) is defined according to any one of claims 6 to 13.

23. The composition according to claim 21, wherein the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) is defined according to claim 14 or 15.

24. The composition according to any one of claims 21 to 23, wherein the elastomeric copolymer (b) is present in admixture with the crystalline propylene homopolymer or copolymer (a) in a predetermined amount, defined according to any one of claims 16 to 20.

25. The composition according to any one of claims 21 to 24, wherein the inorganic filler is an inorganic oxide or hydroxide.

26. The composition according to claim 25, wherein the inorganic filler is selected from magnesium hydroxide, aluminium hydroxide or alumina trihydrate (Al₂O₃ · 3H₂O), or mixtures thereof.

27. The composition according to any one of claims 21 to 26, wherein the inorganic filler is present in amounts of between 10 and 80% by weight, relative to the total weight of the polymeric mixture.

28. The composition according to claim 27, wherein the inorganic filler is present in amounts of between 30 and 70% by weight, relative to the total weight of the polymeric mixture.

29. The composition according to any one of claims 21 to 28, also comprising a coupling agent.

30. A cable comprising a conductor and one or more coating layers, wherein at least one of the said coating layers comprises a flame-retardant polymeric composition according to any one of claims 21 to 29.

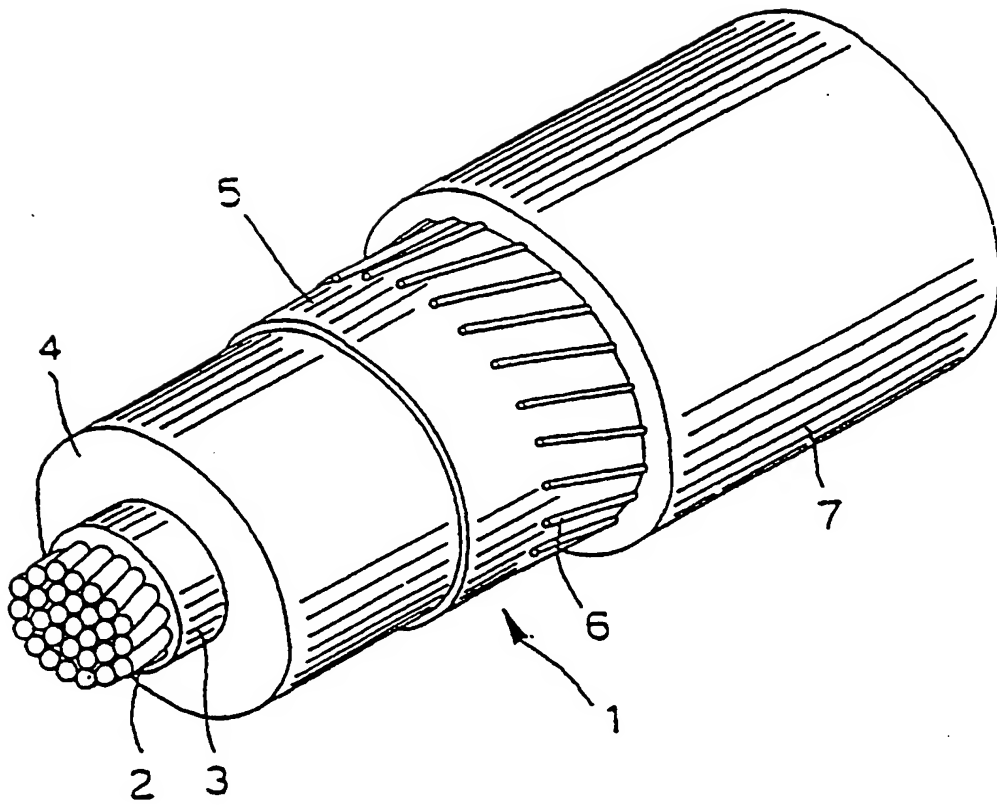


FIG. 1



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 98 11 2528

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
A	WO 94 06859 A (DOW CHEMICAL CO ; SILVIS H CRAIG (US); MURRAY DANIEL J (US); FISKE) 31 March 1994 * claims 1-14 *		H01B3/44 C08L23/16
A	EP 0 328 051 A (DU PONT) 16 August 1989 * claims 1-5 *		
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
			H01B C08L
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 27 August 1998	Examiner Stienon, P
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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